



The Significance of “Identity” in the “Image” of the Iranian-Islamic City*

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ABSTRACT: Identity is one of the focal concepts and ideas for any human being. Any kind of activity carried out by human is an attempt to gain identity which his Weltanschauung-oriented ideals determine for him. Contemplating the significance and inner nature of objects and actions can function as one of the most important creators of the identity of the individual, society, and the city. Different faces of the old city in Iran and the contemporary cities in Iran are because of identity. In addition, to form and geometrical properties of space and aesthetic addition to the form, is also having a sense of meaning in the collective memory of society closes. Constructive elements of form, composition and method of operating time, everyone has the ability to associate a meaning, enhancing the ability to create a mental image, a sense of place and urban identity. So characteristic of the city can create a mental image in the minds of citizens of the city. The present article, while reviewing the concepts of urban form and Perceived environmental, looks at Islamic urbanism. Importantly it evokes a sense of the Iranian Islamic city. The method explored in the Iranian cities is analytical and field survey to gather information. The results show that there are conceptual and aesthetic values which aimed to provide readability and enhance the image of Iranian cities. In addition, research suggests that the consequences of belonging to a place in the Iranian city provides spatial identity.

Keywords: Urban Form, Perceived Environment, Identity, Wisdom of Islamic, Art, Moral Values in Islamic Cities.

INTRODUCTION

The identity of each period is determined by characteristics and advantages of that period relative to that of the previous period. When we speak of the town's identity, we mean distinction of towns from one another. Consideration is what is common between both cities. Establishment of identity attributes to the identity of natural, synthetic or manmade city. So, the image in people minds as to what is expected from the spatial organization of the city.

Every space, more or less, has an identity and the ultimate identity of the space is the resultant of its functional, physical, environmental, cultural and semantic

identities. This makes possible distinguishing the Iranian urban space from the urban spaces of other civilizations by determination of the identity characteristics of each kind of space.

The main purpose of the present paper is to explain the role of “identity” in the image of the Iranian Islamic urban form.

URBAN FORM

The urban form is a reality independent of the observer which continuously existed, and send messages.

In urban landscape of the city, the quality becomes

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directly perceptible. Characteristics of the city form can create a mental image in the minds of the citizens and the sense of place.

Image of the city, including the degree of perception, and recognition, establish links between elements, and the link between the city and the city's link with the events, places and times, with non-spatial concepts and values. It creates a strong mental image of the city, and provides people interaction with the environment (Habib, 2006, p. 9).

PERCEIVED ENVIRONMENTAL

Human perception of the environment is the most important environmental issue in psychology. That is the process by which the human data, the choice of surroundings. This process has a purpose. And it depends on the culture, attitudes and values that govern the perception of thinking.

So, human understanding of the environment is always associated with perception process.

Environmental Perception and Residential Treatment

Some factors affecting the design of components and urban forms include culture, religion, construction methods and materials, the aesthetic concepts or residential treatment.

These factors, alone or in combination with appropriate priorities can influence urban and architectural design.

“WISDOM”, “IDENTITY” AND “AESTHETIC” IN IRANIAN CITIES

Islamic Art

In the description of the Islamic art, one should say that it is the faith of Islam itself that derives its identity from monotheism.

Though the faith of Islam has not established a special artistic expression, but each aspect of it involves the possibility of visual and symbolic representation.

The main influence on this artistic expression is that of the Quran. In fact, Quran influences all aspects of the life of Muslims through calligraphy, reading and prayer.

The Islamic art is not inspired by the apparent meaning or the form of Quran, but it is inspired by its “formless essence” and mainly, the concept of monotheism

Here, one must recall that the Islamic art is involved in not the representation models, but in the way of reflecting

in the divine monotheism.

The difference between the Islamic art and the non-Islamic and non-divine art is in the fact that in the former, the artist by approaching God, moves away from his desires and sees the nature and the universe, not from personal profit and loss view, but with the truth watching eye and sees nothing but beauty.

The Wisdom of Islamic Art

Islamic art is the achievements of the manifestation of unity in multiplicity. Islamic art is founded on a knowledge which is called theology by the traditional masters of art in Islamic world.

Since in Islamic traditions or its mystical formula, wisdom and spirituality are inseparable and are accounted for as different figures of a truth, the theology on which the Islamic art is steadfast is nothing except the wisely side of Islamic spirituality. Therefore, it is natural that on the basis of this view, art also gets its values and principles from the man's moral elevation.

Man's moral elevation trend begins from the material life and the world of multiplicity and its beauties and enters the rational life and its beauties. Then he finds his way in the spiritual life's sphere to reach his moral splendid perfection and its heavenly beauties.

Man, Allah's successor, creates an art, so that his godly nature is directly related to its meaning and content.

Considering the proposed foundations above, it might be possible to understand the secret of Islamic art's various manifestations. And perhaps we can recognize resources of the art's unity principles on the expansion of place and time. Therefore, it is clear that we should relate the source of Islamic art and the principles and natural powers which have created it to the Islamic view points. This art crystallizes inner inspirations of Islamic truths in the pictorial world, and as it is originated from the Islamic inner side, it leads him to the Allah's inner inspiration's privacy.

Reviving of the mentioned points is the first step for a valuable life which can settle forgotten principles in architecture. As Iran has been one of the most important centers of civilization, particularly Islamic art during the long centuries of Islam history, we can show the bases of art towards the moralities in different areas and arenas.

Therefore, the Islamic Art is based on knowledge, which itself has a spiritual, non-material nature. A knowledge that is called «wisdom» by traditional masters of the Islamic art, that is, knowledge with a spiritual nature.

Islamic towns are representations of values and principles emerging from Islamic teachings. Equilibrium,



coordination, hierarchy, introversion, being free from misrepresentation and self-expression, avoiding from excess in consumption, the human scale and other principles being observed in the environment made by Muslims, all have derived their definitions from Islam and have substantial differences with characteristics of these same principles in other civilizations.

The element governing the historical town of Muslims is «the mosque», and religious and spiritual places, not those with more material and worldly functions. The minarets, and the lapis lazuli or earth-color of the mosque had shaded over the town. The mosque was a shelter for it and governed it. The town's bazaar (the transaction place and apparently material), surrounded by walls and semi-dark, side by side of the mosque, tried to purge itself in order to call those active in it to principles beyond the material life and say that the life is not confined to what you see-in appearance. The school and the Governor's office, too, were sheltered by the mosque. The coordination between the material and the form of buildings reflected the unity and the integrity of the community and the town. The epigraphs above the doors of mosques, homes and other buildings were reminders of the divine verses. The water, the plants, the sky, the light and the wind, all as divine verses play roles in refining the man-made elements and the rude nature-made elements, reminding life and death, purity and unity, and, in a word, God (Naghizadeh, 1999a, p. 30). The town is one of the most important man-made phenomena that, in many occasions, in its definition, the world view have been ignored. The town, constituted by the physique and the laws governing it, has shown itself as a mirror of the human life and by inducing values to man, gives orientation to his activities, too. In a word, the town, as the refraction site of values and the culture was shaped based on ideals and the world view principles of its residents, inducing meanings and values to man. This same environment-man relationship could be regarded as an aspect of life.

In fact, man, by being located in the town's space and making contact with it, in addition to tangible and visible appearances, understands a meaning. This understanding has different degrees, depending on the cultural background and the life of man. The Islamic town is a town reflecting Islam.

In the Islamic town, the material dimensions of life are means to serve the spiritual aspect of life. The Islamic town, in addition to utilizing new techniques, material methods, stresses on preserving values and observing them, too. The Islamic town is a culture-building town (Naghizadeh, 1999b, pp. 47, 54).

The Process of the Influence of the Man-Made Environment on Man

Two sets of internal and external factors contribute to the formation of man's identity.

Internal factors include items such as faith, world view, history, culture and other spiritual realms. Depending on their importance for man, these are effective in forming his identity. The most important contribution is that of faith. Faith means belonging and dependence of the man's personality on a truth that is absolutely accepted for his material and spiritual fortune. This acceptance penetrates so much in his depths of personality that he regards his personality, identity and value as absurd without it. Of course, the value of faith depends on the value of that truth, which has been regarded as absolute fortune for personality (Jafari, 1980). Other factors, too, are effective in shaping man's identity for their own sake, and the more coordinated and the more fit this effect with his beliefs, the more genuine, prominent, interested and honorable for man the resulting identity will be. Islamic teachings introduce man as the substitute of Almighty God on the earth and his functions as a substitute of God entail that his acts have divine act traits and, by awareness of the role being specified for him, he must coordinate all his activities towards playing that role.

This way, the collection of characteristics affecting human activities has been formed by "the principles suggested for his life" and "the laws governing the realm of existence" (Naghizadeh, 2005, p. 25).

But in encountering the phenomena as well as his own acts, man should observe some principles, the most important of which could be inferred and derived from the nature as well, and among the most significant of them, one could mention justice. Justice means placing anything where there is no better place imaginable for it. In fact, by choosing justice and unity as the main principles governing the universe, other principles (such as causality, order, equilibrium, coordination, hierarchy, measure and delimitation), could be introduced as secondary principles and functions of them.

Some order traits governing the realm of existence and the universe include order, unification, equilibrium, coordination, hierarchy, measure and delimitation (Fig.1).

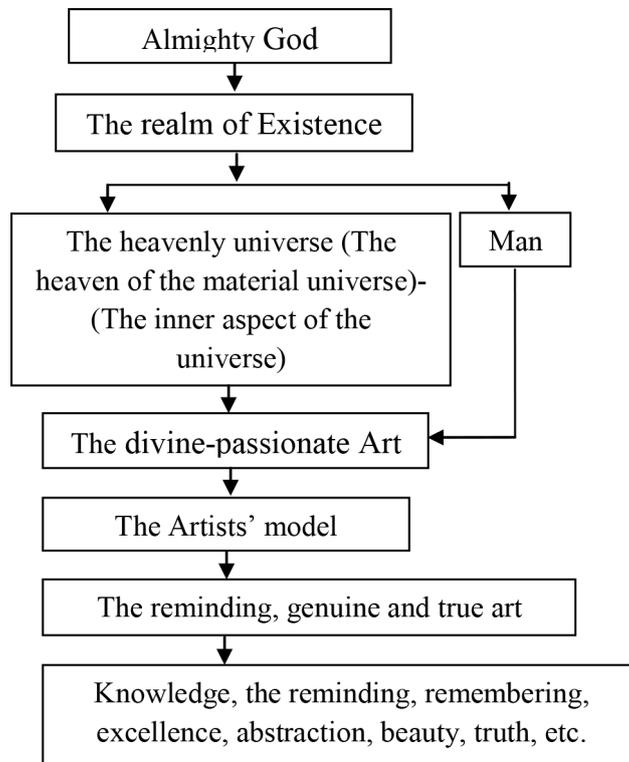


Fig. 1. The Order Traits Governing the Realm of Existence (Naghizadeh, 2010b, p. 469)

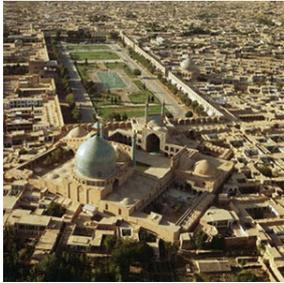
In addition to these principles, the faith has some values, too, involved in the nature and natural elements, are revealed by thinking about divine clues. The most important of which are: praise (God), monotheism,

reminding, beauty, excellence-seeking, etc (Naghizadeh, 2005, p. 155).

The Iranian culture and civilization has shown one of the best reflections of these values in its towns (Table 1).



Table 1. Perceptual Values in the Image of the City

| Emergence of spiritual values | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|--|
| Inspired by Nature in the Manifestation of Spiritual Values | Praising God | Physical and mental dominance of the urban spiritual elements to the urban form |  |
| | Monotheism | The coordination between the material and the form of buildings reflected the unity and the integrity of the community and the town. Principles such as balance and coordination as well as balance and symmetry and homogeneity. |  |
| | Reminding | The epigraphs above the doors of mosques, homes and other buildings were reminders of the divine verses. The water, the plants, the sky, the light and the wind, all as divine verses play roles in refining the man-made elements and the rude nature-made elements, reminding life and death, purity and unity, and, in a word, God. |   |
| | Excellence-seeking | No damage to the world of nature and natural elements |  |
| | Demarcation | Body associations, the horizon, the size and details of the building, defining the size and proportions, functions. |  |



| | | | |
|---|-------------|---|--|
| Inspired by Nature in the Manifestation of Spiritual Values | Equilibrium | Functions responsive to people's needs |  |
| | Unity | Unity of body, space, color and proportions of materials and components |  |
| | Guidance | After God created the world and its parts, has led the world. |  |
| | Simplicity | A sense of the space, Facilitate understanding of the main features of the space, Ease of access to the space, readily and easily identify the location and orientation of space. |  |
| Physical Characteristics in Iranian Islamic Cities | | Open space, Public space, Social interaction space | Lack of volume hierarchy in the urban scale |
| | | | Continuity of the urban network |
| | | | Superiority of the inner prospect over the outer prospect |
| | | | Complex network of pathways |
| | | | Lack of street network |
| | | | Top of empty space to fill volume |

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Identity

Every space, more or less, has an identity and the ultimate identity of the space is the resultant of its functional, physical, environmental, cultural and semantic identities. This makes possible distinguishing the Iranian urban space from the urban spaces of other civilizations by determination of the identity characteristics of each kind of space.

1. The cultural identity: The people, while understanding the identity of space and feeling "identity with the space", find it coordinated and associated with their own identity.
2. The environmental identity: Is associated with items such as coordination with the natural Environment, utilization of local material and specified natural elements.
3. The semantic identity: Display both the collective and historical memories of a civilization or



nation and their forms. Shapes and functions remind us of concepts and meanings that are understandable by the people to some degree and the aliens either don't understand them or find them as distinct from their own meanings.

4. The physical identity: In the Iranian urban space, in their unity and repetition at the level of any town as well as in their physical characteristics, which were constructed with the minimum number of openings, along with the type of material and familiar forms and elements, one could distinguish them from the physical identity

of the urban spaces of other nations.

5. The functional identity: considering the distinctions between same functions in different cultures, it was fully distinctive and distinguishable from non-Iranian spaces.

Features of Urban Spaces with and without Identity

According to the article, the Comparison between identity-enhancer and identity-attenuator in Iranian urban space features in Iran is shown in Table 2:

Table 2. Comparison of features of urban spaces with and without identity (Naghizadeh, 2010a, p. 334)

| Features of the urban spaces which identify and establish the Iranian culture and civilization | Features of the urban space attenuating the Iranian values |
|--|---|
| Comprehensive aesthetics: Spiritual, mental, apparent from different aspects: qualitative and quantitative | Non-beauty (Ugliness); at most bearing apparent, formal beauty |
| Purgation and purity | Pollution and impurity |
| Reminder, remembering, example | Ignoring, |
| Displaying the Iranian historical continuity and origin | Imitation and repetition of foreign models |
| Reflection of Physical, mental, spiritual, cultural and material security | Feeling of psychological, mental, spiritual, cultural and material insecurity |
| Genuineness | Imitation |
| The display of balance, equivalence, coordination, organization and order | Imbalance, non-equilibrium, in coordination, irregularity and disorder |
| Appropriate for holding national and religious rites | Appropriate for holding foreign ceremonies |
| Relaxation, discipline, unity and association | Turbulence, disturbance and congestion |
| Familiarity with people and space | Feeling strange with respect to the space and among the people |
| Excellence-oriented and genuine | Disconnected from its own history, culture and identity of its community and background |

The most important spatial characteristics of the Islamic town are: openness of the space, commonness of the space, establishment of social interactions in the space. Also, one could see the following features in the image and the physique of Islamic towns: Lack of structural difference between religious and non-religious architectures, lack of volume hierarchies in the urban

scale, continuity of the urban network, superiority of the internal prospect over the external prospect, the complex network of pass ways, lack of the street network, superiority of the blank space over the volume expression (Table 3).



Table 3. Comparative Study of Physical Characteristics and Spiritual Values in The Iranian Town

| Comparative study of Physical Characteristics and Spiritual Values in the Iranian Town | |
|--|---|
| Emergence of spiritual values | Physical Characteristics |
| Demarcation | Continuity of the urban network |
| Equilibrium | Lack of structural differences between religious and non-religious architectures Superiority of the inner prospect over the outer prospect |
| Unity | Lack of structural differences between religious and non-religious architectures |
| Guidance | Continuity of the urban network |
| Simplicity | Lack of volume hierarchy in the urban scale |

CONCLUSION

A realistic ideal for us, which is materialized in the objective universe, and will create beauty, is the connection with the past and the future... perhaps no instant in the life is more ambiguous and darker than the instant in which man regards himself as wholly detached from the past and unable to connect to the future.

Since for treatment of the community's culture, understanding its indicators is the first step, "Artistic identification" could be an initial point for achieving that purpose. Common spiritual roots between Islamic States should be sought after in their beliefs and their attitudes to the life and what that is the result of these thoughts, shows itself in different artistic aspects.

If the nature is an excuse for thinking about God or "Zekr", it is due to the fact that its creator has been God. And if the Art can be a carrier for reciting "Ahad", it is due to the fact that, though its creator is the man, but is ensued from an extra-individual inspiration and wisdom, which returns back to "Him".

In contemporary Islamic towns, in addition to the values that were reflected in historical towns, ought to both reflect other values, and represent the new method of reflecting the values such that they are responsible to the needs of the modern man and provide a model appropriate for the man's environment. While in the past, the town's physique induced a balance, equilibrium, human scale and, most importantly, a spirituality in the man, the urban environment of today induces disorder, stress, incoordination, disproportion, ugliness and, most importantly, the rule of materialism over the quality of

man's life. Though the physique of the town was built with few and limited materials, but variety of shapes, proportions and volumes had led to their being free from uniformity and boredom. The urban communities were well defined and man, in any encounter, was forced to say greetings, feeling unity with the community and not feeling strange. Encountering religious spaces, religious quarters and water drinking places, revives memories, history, liberal thinking and fairness. In the home space, the man-made products were associated with divine products.

The wholeness of the town has been ignored in urban design in 20th century. Our new towns are a compound and a collection of different architectural forms. The 5000 years urban history shows that the complex texture of alleys and squares has been a necessity for linking the districts and ultimately forming urban identity centers. Lack of theoretical bases derived from Islamic teachings and Iranian cultures are the most prominent shortcoming and deficiency that are being raised in the realm of modern Iranian architecture and urban development. This theoretical gap leads to the situation where, not only preparing plans and programs based on principles and values believed by the community is faced with difficulty, but there is no possibility for evaluation of plans and programs, including the domestic ones and those derived from foreign nations.

In case of continuation of lack of communication between the individual and the space, we will face an event called, "identity crisis". The first consequence of identity crisis is the fact that one finds himself as rootless. Nowhere one can ascribe himself to a special



identity; he will feel deficient and will be identity-less. Man, with imposing in the environment surrounding him, tries to provide an identity for himself. But we should not mistake one's mental belonging to a space with one's bearing an identity. Locational belonging, meaning a connection between man and environment, is among the consequences of proving one's identity and always efforts are made with time to prove that belonging. Therefore, one should note that originality does not mean absolute denial of historical identity, culture and tradition and usage of the community. Instead, originality means finding an appropriate response in time and space to cultural values and using the ideas and experiences of the past generations by evolving them.

Proving spatial identity has some results, the most important of which are:

1. Identification with the space: when one's subjectivity of the space turns into objectivity.
2. Spatial belonging: the interconnection between man and the environment, that sometimes goes beyond the level of emotional, cognitive and individual experiences and is tied with a common collective sense in broader spatial limits.
3. Mental belonging: when one's spatial belonging is influenced by factors such as memory in time and space and its association, it will turn into a mental belonging.

Crisis in the spatial identity occurs when the spatial identity is incompatible with the ideal identity of its bearer, so that its physical, functional and semantic characteristics carry a message and meaning that do not fit to what is expected from the place and its residents for the bearer and even for those who are around him.

Generally, one could say that in urban design, the following values should always be paid attention:

“what the people see”, that is, the ability to really understand the environment; “what the people admire”, that is, the ability to admire, understand and use the urban environment; “what the people can use”, that is, availability and real access to urban spaces during daily activities; “what the people remember”, that is, remembering good experiences of the past from urban spaces; “what the people associate”, that is, the symbolic, cultural, historical and semantic aspects in urban spaces (Bahreini, 2007).

Today, identity crisis is known as a universal crisis, one aspect of which is related to lack of identity of spaces. Spaces having the same form and shape. In the past, wherever the people lived, they had a sense of being rooted in the space and being dependant on it.

Therefore, these solutions are important:

1. Improvement in environmental conditions, by appropriate stress on the relation between man and environment
2. Enhancing the place of religious and historical elements and regeneration of urban environments dependant on those elements
3. Activation of social and cultural elements by designing and constructing areas appropriate for people's presence and improving the participatory power of citizens in urban spaces.
4. Physical improvement of the town by paying attention to physical components of urban identity
5. Creation of cognitive and aesthetic values with the purpose of providing the readability and upgrading the mental image of the town.



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